



REPORT ON THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION'S

Decision to Close a Residential School & Consolidate Programs

Presented to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee
of the North Carolina General Assembly in accordance with
Section 7.25 of Session Law 2011-145 - Appropriations Act of 2011

December 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Carolina General Assembly transferred the administration of the North Carolina School for the Deaf, the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind (collectively, the 'residential schools') from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) effective June 1, 2011, with the passage of the Appropriations Act of 2010 (Session Law 2010-31). Shortly after the transfer, in the Appropriations Act of 2011 (Session Law 2011-145), the General Assembly found that the residential schools no longer meet the needs of the populations they serve in an efficient and effective manner and that current levels of utilization can be accommodated at two schools. This Act directs the NCDPI to report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee the residential school it has decided to close and its plan for consolidating the programs with those at the two remaining residential schools. It also prescribes five areas of consideration in making the closure/consolidation decision. With the closure/consolidation, the General Assembly is imposing a \$5.5 million recurring reduction to the appropriation for the residential schools.

The residential schools are on the continuum of services for students who are deaf/hard of hearing or who have visual impairments, including blindness. Local educational agencies (LEAs) throughout North Carolina currently serve around 2,200 students identified as eligible for special education under the area of 'deafness' or 'hearing impairment' and over 700 students identified under 'visual impairment.' Many more students with these disabilities have additional impairments and are identified under other eligibility areas. The residential schools, in total, serve around 160 students who are deaf/hard of hearing and fewer than 50 students with visual impairments. The current appropriations level for the residential schools is approximately \$22.4 million, more than \$100,000 per child per year, as reflected in the table below.

School	# of Students	Total Budget 2011-12	Cost per Student
Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf	78	\$8,168,273.00	\$104,721.45
Governor Morehead School for the Blind	47	\$5,523,830.00	\$117,528.30
North Carolina School for the Deaf	78	\$8,684,716.00	\$111,342.51

The NCDPI engaged in several activities in preparation to receive the residential schools, including the development of a transition plan and the conducting of comprehensive needs assessments and facilities evaluations. These efforts helped in the data-gathering process for the closure/consolidation decision. Also, the NCDPI had several efforts to garner input in the decision-making process, including conducting an online survey (over 900 responses), having discussions with residential school administration and staff, holding three public hearings (over 1,500 total in attendance) and inviting additional written comments.

The NCDPI finds that each campus is significantly underutilized due to decreased enrollments and could absorb the consolidation with at least one other residential school with varying degrees of renovation costs. The most costly solution would be the transfer of one of the schools for the deaf to the Governor Morehead School campus. The greatest effect on travel would be the consolidation of the schools for the deaf. Each scenario for closure/consolidation presents a challenge to service

delivery and to family/socialization concerns. Each school has strong community and host city support. Therefore, the NCDPI will: close the Governor Morehead School as a separate school; consolidate its administration and programs with the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and; operate a satellite campus of the Eastern North Carolina School for students with visual impairments on the Governor Morehead campus. The NCDPI will determine how to comply with the recurring reduction to the appropriations for the residential schools. Consideration will be given to various budget reduction strategies, such as consolidating administrative positions, leasing property at one or more of the campuses as mentioned earlier, and reducing other operating expenses of the schools. Specific attention will be given to the leasing of a percentage of the Governor Morehead School campus. The NCDPI also will explore using underutilized space at the schools for the deaf for other educational needs.

Finally, the NCDPI is committed to improving not only the efficiency of these schools, but also their policy compliance and effectiveness. Examination of the comprehensive needs assessments, outcome data, visits to the schools and the public input has identified several areas for operational improvement. With the residential schools now under NCDPI administration, the State is poised to implement program planning, development, management and evaluation to affect needed operational changes.

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

With the Appropriations Act of 2011 – Session Law 2011-145, the General Assembly mandated the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to (1) close one of the three residential schools serving children and youth with vision and hearing disabilities and (2) plan for the consolidation of the programs at the two remaining schools. The legislation directed NCDPI to report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee of the General Assembly by January 15, 2012. This report is the NCDPI's response to the mandate.

The General Assembly's sensitivity to and concern for the educational needs of children and youth who are deaf and blind is evident by its finding that the operation of the residential schools no longer meets the needs of the populations they serve in an effective and efficient manner. Further, the General Assembly's concern for the welfare of children and youth and the citizens of the State is recognized by its directive that the NCDPI base its decision on five considerations:

- minimization of the impact on services to deaf and blind students currently served by the residential schools,
- minimization of costs of modifications at the two remaining schools to accommodate students from the closed school,
- maximization of funds generated or net savings to the State from costs avoided due to the closure of one school and the sale or transfer to other State agencies of the school campus and other physical assets,
- minimization of required travel for students of the school that is closed, and
- historical and cultural significance of the school.

The Appropriations Act of 2011 included a money report to specifically note any adjustment to State-funded expenses. The appropriation for the residential schools already has been reduced approximately \$1.7 million for the Fiscal Year 2011. The budget for Fiscal Year 2012 lists another recurring reduction of \$5.5 million.

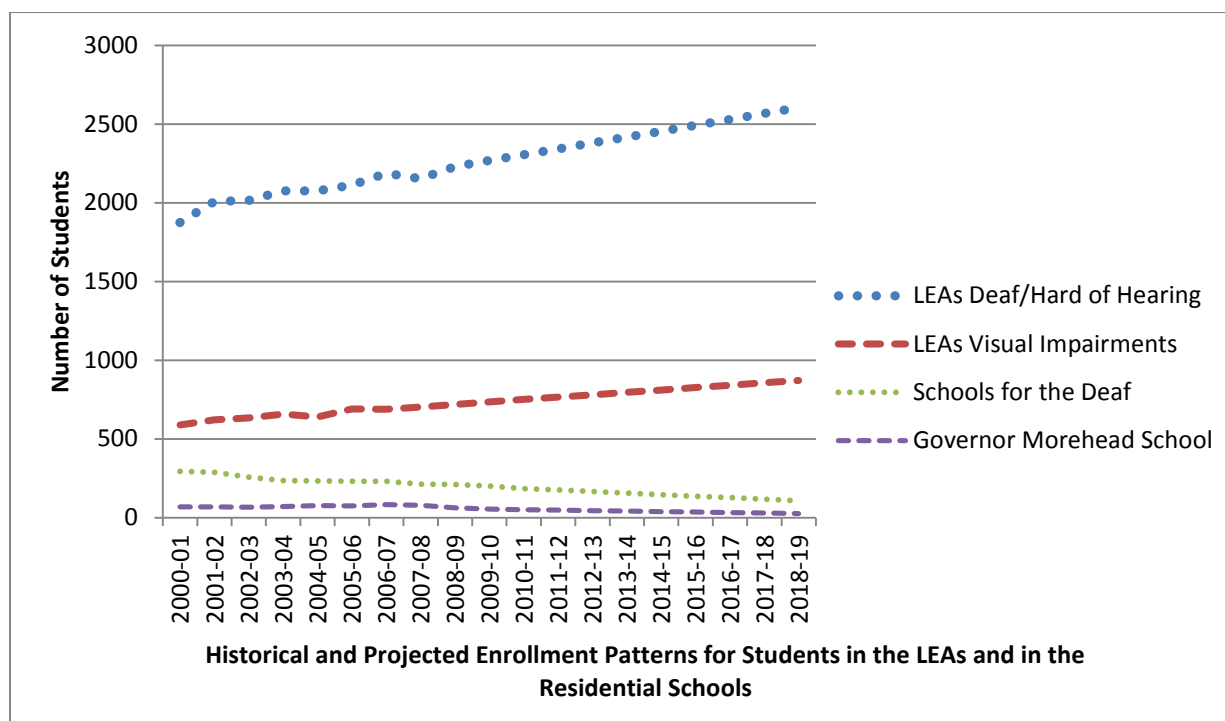
BACKGROUND/PRIOR INFORMATION

Brief History

North Carolina has been responsive to the educational needs of children and youth who are deaf and blind as evidenced by various legislative actions since opening the first residential school in Raleigh in 1845. Significant legislative actions are noted below.

- 1845 – North Carolina Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and Blind opened in Raleigh (ninth state residential school in the nation)
- 1869 – North Carolina School for Colored Deaf and Blind opened in Raleigh (first state school for African American children and youth in the nation)
- 1894 – North Carolina School for the Deaf in Morganton opened (children transferred from Raleigh to Morganton)
- 1923 – North Carolina School for the Blind opened on Ashe Avenue in Raleigh
- 1929 – Campus opened on Garner Road in Raleigh for African American children who were deaf and blind (last graduation class for African American children from Garner Road campus in 1970)
- 1964 – Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf in Wilson opened
- 1968 – Innovative legislation passed, allowing public school systems to serve children who were deaf beginning at one year of age
- 1974 – Comprehensive exceptional child legislation passed, mandating public school systems to serve all children with disabilities
- 1975 – Central North Carolina School for the Deaf in Greensboro opened
- 1977 – Legislation passed aligning NC legislation with Federal legislation (PL 94-142, Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975), mandating service to all children with disabilities (since updated)

The state and federal special education laws (beginning in the 1970s) requiring local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide a free, appropriate public education to children with disabilities had a significant impact on the residential schools. As LEAs gradually increased their capacity to serve students with visual impairments and those who are deaf/hard of hearing, placement and enrollment at the residential schools gradually declined. In 2000, the Central North Carolina School for the Deaf was closed by the General Assembly due to an overall reduction in enrollment at the three schools for the deaf. Currently around 2,200 children with a special education primary area of eligibility in 'deafness' or 'hearing impaired' and 715 children with an eligibility area of 'visually impaired' are being served by the LEAs. Many additional students who are deaf or hard of hearing or who have visual impairments are identified under other special education eligibility areas (e.g., other health impairment, multiple disabilities, intellectual disability, etc.). Enrollment now stands at fewer than 80 at each of the schools for the deaf and fewer than 50 at the Governor Morehead School. Studies (listed below) have been commissioned in recent years to examine the viability and effectiveness of the remaining schools and services throughout the state to students who are deaf or hard of hearing or who have visual impairments.



Overarching Legislation/Policies

Federal and state laws and regulations apply to the education of children with disabilities, including those with visual impairments and those who are deaf/hard of hearing.

- The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004** is the most current federal statute designed to assist States in the education of children with disabilities in order to improve results and to ensure equal protection of the law. Prefacing language in IDEA states that Congress finds that “disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in and contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.”
- The **IDEA Final Regulations** (*Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities*) give specific direction to State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and other State agencies that educate children with disabilities and receive federal IDEA funds, including the residential schools.
- At the State level, public education services to children with disabilities are governed by **Article 9 of Chapter 115C** (entitled *Education of Children with Disabilities*) in the North Carolina General Statutes.

- The regulations giving specific direction on the fulfillment of Article 9 are in the Policy Manual of the North Carolina State Board of Education and are codified in ***Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities***. Also, the North Carolina General Assembly has laws (i.e., in Chapter 143B) regarding the establishment and operation of the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, the North Carolina School for the Deaf and the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf under the management of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). Though the General Assembly transferred these three schools to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction on June 1, 2011, language in Article 143B has not yet been amended to reflect this change.

Recent Legislation/Studies

The General Assembly has directed studies and reviews of the residential schools numerous times dating back to the 1980s. Several recent legislative directives that have addressed the education of students with visual impairments and students who are deaf/hard of hearing are noteworthy. They include:

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| 2007 | <p><u>Evaluation of Educational Services to Students with Hearing and Visual Impairments</u> (Appropriations Act of 2007, Session Law 2007-323, § 10.20)</p> <p>The Appropriations Act of 2007 directed the NCDHHS to collaborate on an evaluation of the State's entire service delivery model for deaf and blind students, determine whether the residential schools should remain under the purview of the NCDHHS or be transferred to the NCDPI, and develop a plan to reduce institutional capacity. The resulting evaluation indicated that the model at the time was legally compliant but also revealed concerns about availability of services throughout the state. A follow-up report indicated that transferring the schools to the NCDPI likely would not result in financial savings but recommended various strategies for increased collaboration between the agencies and increased collaboration among LEAs to promote a fuller continuum of services for these populations.</p> |
| 2009 | <p><u>Office of Education Services/Funds Transfer</u> (Appropriations Act of 2009, Session Law 2009-451, § 10.51)</p> <p>The Appropriations Act of 2009 directed the NCDHHS to collaborate with NCDPI and the State Board of Education to develop a report to achieve efficiencies of scale and ensure appropriate education of students with visual and hearing impairments. The report offered four possible designs for continuing the residential schools (including varying degrees of consolidated residential programs and regional day programs, the increased use of distance technology and outreach services, and direct reporting to the State Board of Education), all under the Office of Education Services within NCDHHS administration.</p> |

2010 Office of Education Services/Transfer of Residential and Preschool Services for the Deaf and Blind (Appropriations Act of 2010, Session Law 2010-31, § 10.21A.) The Appropriations Act of 2010 created significant changes to the operation of the residential schools. Effective October 1, 2010, it eliminated the NCDHHS Office of Education Services, which had provided administrative oversight of the residential schools, and transferred the Governor Morehead Outreach Program and the Resource Support Program for Students Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing to the NCDPI's Exceptional Children Division. It eliminated many school-level administrative positions and consolidated the functions of the School Director and School Principal positions at each school. The NCDHHS was directed to hire an interim superintendent and the State Board of Education was directed to hire a superintendent through a prescribed search committee. The State Board of Education was also charged with developing and implementing a transition plan that would transfer the residential schools, the Governor Morehead Preschool Program and the Early Intervention Program for Children Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to the NCDPI on June 1, 2011.

2011 Residential Schools (Appropriations Act of 2011, Session 2011-145, § 7.25) Shortly after receiving the transfer of the residential schools, the NCDPI was directed through the Appropriations Act of 2011 to report to the General Assembly a decision on which one of the residential school campuses would be closed and the plan for consolidating programs from the closed campus with those at the two remaining schools. The legislation listed the five specific consideration areas (i.e., on page 5 of this report) on which the school closure decision must be based. The report is due to the General Assembly by January 15, 2012 and the NCDPI must carry out the report's closure decision effective July 1, 2012.

Budgets

The current appropriation for each school, following the recent 4.4% cut for FY2011-2012, is as follows:

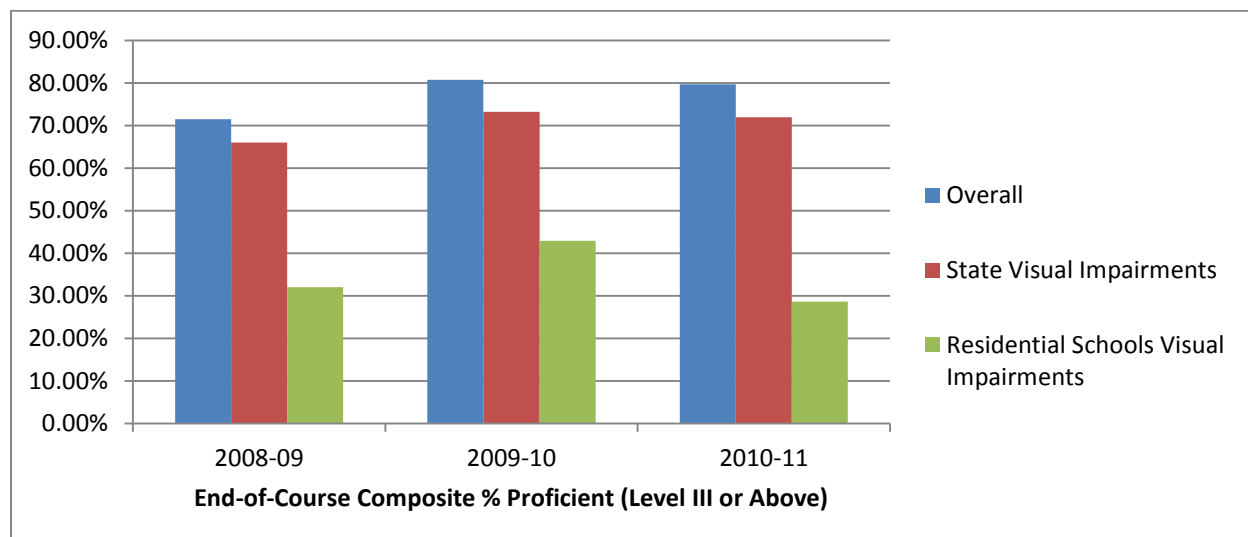
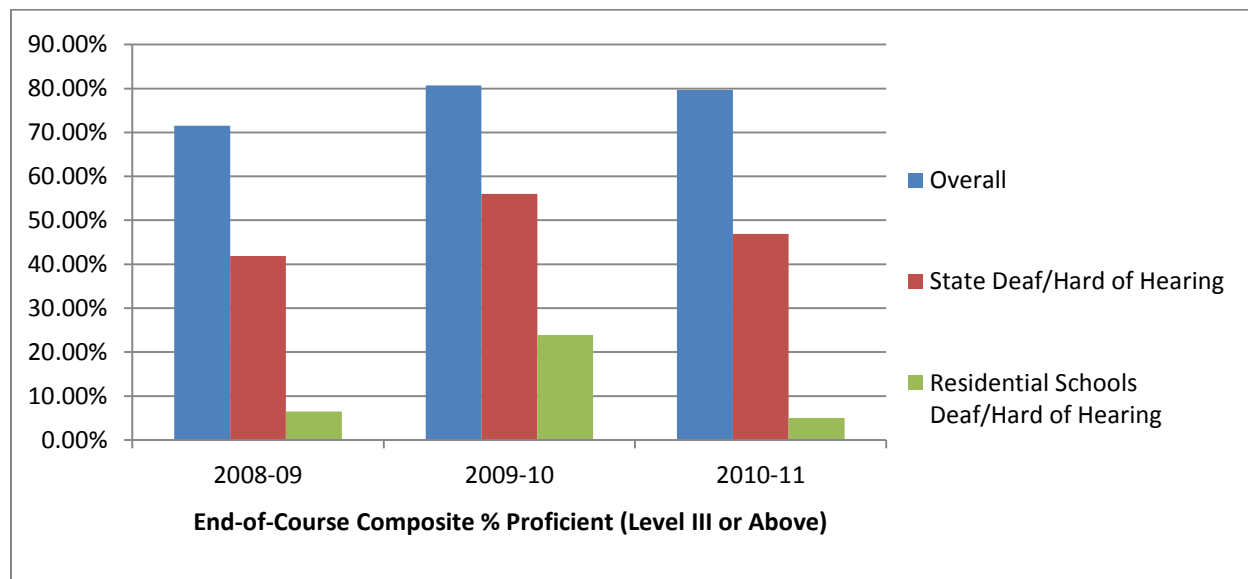
- North Carolina School for the Deaf: \$8,684,716 (78 current students; approximately 57 residential students, 21 day students)
- Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf: \$8,168,273 (78 current students; approximately 57 residential students, 21 day students)
- Governor Morehead School for the Blind: \$5,523,830 (47 current students; approximately 35 residential students, 12 day students)

School	# of Students	Total Budget 2011-12	Cost per Student
Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf	78	\$8,168,273.00	\$104,721.45
Governor Morehead School for the Blind	47	\$5,523,830.00	\$117,528.30
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Approximately 80% of the budget at each school has been devoted to personnel expenditures. The remainder is devoted to operational expenses, including food service, maintenance, health care, housekeeping, utilities and the like. Both schools for the deaf have their own maintenance staff while the Governor Morehead School contracts with NCDHHS Central Regional Maintenance for all utilities and maintenance. The contract for 2011-12 is \$1,395,547 and separate from the overall appropriation for GMS (\$5,523,830).

Outcomes/Data

Data indicate that students at the residential schools achieve significantly below their counterparts who have visual impairments or who are deaf/hard of hearing in regular public schools. For example, in 2008-09 only 14.5% End-of-Course (EOC) tests taken by residential school students generated proficient scores, while 48.5% of EOC tests taken by LEA students who are deaf/hard of hearing generated proficient scores. Gaps similar to and larger than these apply to similar comparisons in End-of-Grade (EOG) tests and across the past six years at all three schools.



Assertions have been made that it is not reasonable to expect students in the residential schools to achieve at the same levels as their counterparts in regular public schools, citing various reasons (e.g., additional disabilities, mental health diagnoses, etc.). However, many LEA students who are deaf or hard of hearing or who have visual impairments also have the additional disabilities described above. Also, it is important to note that the decisions about grade assignment, course enrollment and the appropriate assessments to administer are made at the individual student level by those who know the student best, including parents. For students at the residential school, this includes that school's staff and administration. With that, it is reasonable to compare outcomes between LEAs and residential programs to help guide decisions on the effectiveness of current educational programming and any necessary adjustments.

Transfer to NCDPI

The NCDPI undertook several efforts and strategies in preparation to receive the residential schools in June 2011. In addition to numerous meetings and planning sessions with NCDHHS staff, seven significant activities (a Transition Plan, three Facilities Reports, and three Comprehensive Needs Assessments) were conducted and are summarized below.

Transition Plan

The legislative action directing the transfer of the residential schools and preschool programs from the NCDHHS to the NCDPI also required the State Board of Education to develop a transition plan to address structural adjustments within the NCDPI, proposed staffing for appropriate oversight, collaboration with the NCDHHS to continue particular student services, and other items. The Transition Plan completed by the NCDPI addressed these items and proposed several measures to ensure a smooth transition. Some recommendations, such as reestablishing the principal positions at each school, have been allowed by the General Assembly, provided they can be met with existing funds. Other recommendations, such as the establishment of a small administrative office within the NCDPI to support the superintendent to oversee the residential schools, were not approved. This most recent legislation initiates even further cuts, including the elimination of the superintendent position, and renders moot some of the Transition Plan's core recommendations. However, some recommendations did carry forward, such as the transfer of the early intervention/preschool programs to the Office of Early Learning, the conducting of Comprehensive Needs Assessments at each school, and the establishment of targets for improvement in academic achievement.

Facilities Reports

During the fall of 2010, the architectural and engineering staff from School Planning and Plant Operation visited each of the residential school campuses to roughly evaluate the condition and needs of the facilities. Generally, the findings were that all three campuses need significant improvements due to their age, low funding, deterioration and changes in life safety and ADA requirements. Also, each campus is significantly underutilized with entire buildings or groups of buildings not currently in use. The North Carolina School for the Deaf (Morganton) and the Eastern School for the Deaf (Wilson) are in much better condition for long term use. A detailed report on each campus is attached to the end of this report.

Comprehensive Needs Assessments (CNA)

During the spring of 2011, Comprehensive Needs Assessment visits were conducted at each of the three residential schools. A CNA is a systematic assessment of practices, processes and systems within a school to assist leadership in determining needs, examining their nature and causes, and setting priorities for future action. The CNA provides a framework which:

- Provides districts and schools with a clear view of their strengths, areas for improvement, challenges, and successes;
- Enables a systematic review of practices, processes, and systems within a school district.
- Assists district and school leadership in determining needs, examining their nature and causes, and setting priorities for future action;
- Guides the development of a meaningful district or school plan and suggests benchmarks for evaluation; and
- Most importantly, provides a cornerstone for continuous improvement – ensuring the best possible education for all students.

Information on accessing each full CNA report is available in the Appendices. The CNA report from each school yielded the following recommendations.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- Align instruction to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study;
- Use 21st Century technology;
- Develop a strong literacy program, and;
- Improve leadership capacity.

CURRENT INPUT PROCESSES BY SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC

Recognizing the magnitude of the two-fold task the legislation placed upon the NCDPI (identify for closure one of the three residential schools and to develop a plan for consolidating the programs of the school to be closed at the two remaining schools), the Department's leadership prepared a strategic plan for implementing the task. One component of the plan was to obtain input from personnel at the three schools and the general public. Noting that obtaining input from school personnel and the citizens of North Carolina was not included in the legislation, the Department thought it wise to hear from others about the legislative mandate before attempting to make a decision as to which school to close.

Three opportunities were provided for people to express their concerns and recommendations to the NCDPI meeting face-to-face with the Core Committee, submitting statements in writing and completing an online survey. The face-to-face sessions were held in Morganton on September 20, in Wilson on September 22 and in Raleigh on September 28, 2011. During the morning and afternoon at each site, the Core Committee met with three groups of employees of the residential schools: administrative personnel, residential/student-life personnel and instructional/academic personnel. From 5:30 until 7:00 p.m. the Core Committee held well-advertised public hearings.

Approximately 200 school personnel attended the meetings with the Core Committee, with more than half of the number offering comments. At the public hearings, 130 people signed up to speak; time allowed 98 to do so (Morganton: 41/30; Wilson: 48/36; Raleigh: 41/32). Eighty-five written statements were received by the Core Committee (45 in Morganton, 18 in Wilson, 22 in Raleigh). More than 6,000 people signed a petition asking for the North Carolina School for the Deaf (Morganton) to remain open. Additional written statements were received since the hearing up to the time of the writing of this report.

The majority of those who spoke at the hearing pleaded for the schools in their locality to remain open. Among the reasons most cited were the historical significance of the schools, a seemingly lack of appropriate services in the LEAs, and the economic impact on the community. Continuation of deaf culture was often cited by persons speaking on behalf of the schools for the deaf. Proximity to cultural resources and availability of public transportation were among the concerns expressed by persons supporting Governor Morehead School.

The online survey was available for the public to provide their views and provide input from September 12 through September 30, 2011. Nine hundred sixty-nine (969) surveys were submitted.

LEGISLATIVELY-MANDATED CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL CLOSURE DECISION

The five areas the General Assembly mandated the NCDPI to consider when making its decision to close one of the schools are addressed below.

1. Minimization of impact on services to deaf and blind students currently served by the residential schools

The impact on students is recognized as the major concern with school closure. The Department of Public Instruction considered the input given by department staff and by people who shared their concerns at the public hearings or responded to the online survey. Academic achievement, family and socialization concerns, services provided by LEAs and transportation surfaced as issues common to all three schools. This section of the report deals with the first four concerns. Transportation is addressed later.

Academic achievement outcomes are low at all three schools. Closing one school will not raise academic achievement at the other two. The General Assembly's recent transfer of the governance of the residential schools to the Department of Public Instruction and the creation of a residential school section under the direction of the State Superintendent are viewed as a first step in ensuring academic improvement. The academic, instructional and technology resources of the Department of Public Instruction will be more readily available to the residential schools.

Family and socialization concerns will be heightened by the closure of a school. Parents whose children are deaf and use manual communication express doubts about the option of enrolling their children in local education agency schools, should travel times for their children be increased by the closing of a school for the deaf. Although parents and advocates realize that many LEAs serve students who are deaf, they state concerns about the ability of some LEAs to provide adequate numbers of teachers licensed in deaf education and interpreters who have sufficient sign language.

Peer acceptance, social competence and friendship relations for students who are currently enrolled at their residential schools may be negatively impacted should they be moved to another residential school or their parents enroll them in a local education agency school. Effective peer relationships and opportunities for developing a positive identity, which are crucial to healthy development, may be lacking in some local education agency schools due to the limited numbers of children enrolled who are deaf or blind.

Of particular concern for students who are blind would be locating the residential school in a rural area. A strong feature of the school for the blind being in Raleigh is the opportunity provided for students to learn their orientation and mobility skills in an urban environment. In Raleigh students who are blind have access to unlimited orientation and mobility experiences not afforded in more rural settings. Parents and advocates for children who are blind stress the importance and value of independence and safety being learned in a community with public transportation, stores with elevators and escalators, inside and outside malls, museums, etc.

Although more than 90% of students who are deaf/hard of hearing or who have visual impairments are educated in their LEAs, some LEAs, especially in rural areas of the State, experience difficulty recruiting teachers licensed in these specialized areas. With the closing of one of the residential schools, parents may consider their LEA to have limited resources. Too, with the closing of one of the residential schools, the school to which the students are relocated may find it difficult to access related services personnel (e.g., orientation & mobility specialists, audiologists) and other staff. No assurance can be given that personnel and staff at the closed school will be able to accept employment at a school away from their home community.

2. Minimization of costs of modifications at the two remaining residential schools to accommodate students from the closed school

The agency determined the following, using the Facilities Reports and the analysis of fiscal data about the residential and academic facilities at each residential school:

- As the Facilities Reports note, all three schools are in need of significant renovations to continue operating. For example, all campuses would benefit from the installation of sprinkler systems.
- Using current enrollment numbers, both the academic and residential facilities at the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf and the North Carolina School for Deaf are adequate to absorb the residential population of either of the other two campuses without significant additional cost. Though Eagles Hall (i.e., a multi-purpose facility not currently in use) at the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf requires total renovation for possible use, it is not anticipated this facility would be required if this school was to accept the population from either of the other schools.
- The Governor Morehead School would require significant efforts to develop sufficient academic facilities for the student and professional population of either of the schools for the deaf. For example, renovation of Lineberry Hall (the hallmark building on campus) is estimated to cost approximately \$6.1 million. Renovation of classroom space in other buildings is estimated to cost close to \$1.7 million. To acquire this classroom space, several buildings currently in use by other agencies may need to be reclaimed. Costs for relocation of existing agencies are not available without extensive study.

3. Maximization of funds generated or net savings to the State from costs avoided due to the closure of one school and the sale or transfer to other State agencies of the school campus and other physical assets

The maximum net operational savings to the State would occur by the closure of one of the schools for the deaf and the consolidation of those programs at the other school for the deaf. It is anticipated that the current staff at either of these schools could absorb the student population from the other with little or no adjustment to staffing levels. Closure and consolidation involving the Governor Morehead School and one of the schools for the deaf would save fewer funds, as these two programs would continue to require distinct instructional and residential life staff on the same campus. In this scenario, limited savings would be generated from some reduced administrative, personnel, food service, housekeeping and maintenance expenses.

However, the “sale or transfer to other State agencies of the school campus and other physical assets” presents a range of possibilities. Regardless of school closure, each campus and property has the possibility for additional usage and potential generation of funds. Expanding the purpose of each campus to a greater educational vision would allow for these sites to become multi-purpose and multi-agency in nature, achieving a more inclusive and integrated educational environment for the 21st Century. Portions of each campus could be leased to one or more educational entity/entities to establish and operate the following:

- Magnet or charter schools
- Career and College Promise campuses for high school students
- Regional career/technical centers
- Regional specialized schools (e.g., STEM, arts, global language schools)
- Residential internship sites for high school seniors
- Teacher preparation and professional development centers

The leases could also take on some of the operational and personnel expenses (e.g., housekeeping, food service, security, maintenance) currently budgeted for the residential schools, thus reducing the overall and per pupil expenditures at each school.

4. Minimization of required travel for students of the school that is closed

The cost of additional travel to one of the remaining residential schools is relatively negligible, any options resulting in increased costs of less than \$100,000 per year. The most expensive option would involve consolidating the schools for the deaf, resulting in an estimated increase of \$94,000. Consolidation of the North Carolina School for the Deaf and Governor Morehead School programs would mean an estimated increase of \$76,140. Consolidating the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf and the Governor Morehead School programs would result in an estimated increase of \$19,740.

The time of additional travel would vary by consolidation choice, with the minimal impact being a consolidation of the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf and the Governor Morehead School. Consolidating the North Carolina School for the Deaf with either of the other two campuses would result in increased travel (up to four additional hours each way) for nearly all of the students of the closed campus. Only a very small number of these students would have the same or a reduced travel time. Conversely, with a Governor Morehead School/Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf consolidation, most students from the closed campus would have no increase or only a slight increase to travel time (less than one additional hour each way) and a significant number of students would have a reduced travel time.

5. Historical and cultural significance of the school

The North Carolina School for the Deaf was established in 1894 as a day/residential facility for the education of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. It is located on a 160-acre campus in Morganton and is designated as a historical site by the State of North Carolina. The Governor Morehead School was established in 1845 in downtown Raleigh. It was the eighth school for the blind in the United States. The school moved to the current location on Ashe Avenue in Raleigh in 1923. It serves both day and residential students. The Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf was established in 1964 and is also a day/residential facility for the education of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. It is located on a 54-acre campus in Wilson. While the schools are of different historical significance, it is important to note that each of the three schools has a strong community that is passionate and supportive, creative a vibrant culture within each of the three schools.

SCHOOL CLOSURE DECISION AND CONSOLIDATION PLAN

The NCDPI has endeavored to examine existing information, gather stakeholder input, and make decisions in compliance with the legislative directives. Concern for the educational well-being of students is central to the decision-making process. Within this is an attempt to bring the residential schools up to date with current educational systems and a vision for integrated multi-purpose campuses. Along with these efforts, there is an upcoming \$5.5 million recurring reduction to the residential schools' budget, according to the Appropriations Act of 2011.

The review of the consideration areas has led to the NCDPI's conclusion that consolidating the schools for the deaf is not optimal, as each school is a vital part of its host city and community. Therefore, the decision of the NCDPI is to close the Governor Morehead School as a separate school, consolidating its administration and programs with the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf. Additionally, the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf will operate a satellite program for students with visual impairments on the campus of the Governor Morehead School. Students currently attending the Governor Morehead School would continue to receive their education at that site, benefitting from that campus's transportation and cultural resource proximity.

The NCDPI will determine how to comply with the legislative mandate to further reduce the recurring budget for the operation of the residential schools. Consideration will be given to various budget reduction strategies, such as consolidating administrative positions, leasing property at one or more of the campuses as mentioned earlier, and reducing other operating expenses of the schools.

DIRECTION FOR IMPROVED EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL OPERATION AND THE CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

The improvement of education services at the two remaining schools is of primary importance to parents, faculty and staff, the State Board of Education and the NCDPI. Continued economic pressures will place even greater emphasis on both effectiveness and efficiency. Future economic needs may dictate further consolidation of residential schools and programs. With the oversight of the schools under the NCDPI, the State is poised to implement program planning, development, management and evaluation to affect needed operational changes.

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment reports, an examination of student outcome data, the visits to the schools, the public hearings and the online survey identified the following areas where educational improvements are needed:

- Recognition and operation of these schools as bona fide points on the continuum of alternative placements, not as stand-alone institutions;
- Preparation of students to re-enter more inclusive schools and an inclusive world, with transferable academic, social and employment-related skills that allow them to find success in a variety of settings;
- Compliance with State and federal regulations that ensure decisions for student placement are made annually, on an individual student basis, in keeping with the educational needs of the student and the annual goals stated in the student's Individualized Educational Program, and with assurance that the sole decision for placement is made by the Individualized Educational Program Team, which includes the parents;
- In the case of a student with visual impairments, including blindness, provision for instruction both in the general curriculum (i.e., the North Carolina Standard Course of Study) and vision-specific areas such as Braille, independent living skills, assistive technology, and vocational preparedness.
- In the case of a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, recognition of the communication needs of the student, providing strong language development instruction in the student's communication mode to promote communication and literacy in a variety of settings;
- Provision for parent counseling and training that assists them in understanding child development and the special needs of their child and acquisition of the necessary skills that allow them to support the implementation of their child's Individualized Education Program; and
- Development of stronger relationships with LEAs for a variety of purposes, including: effective and efficient transition of students between the LEAs and the residential schools; the building of capacity in the LEAs to serve students who are deaf/hard of hearing or who have visual impairments; and the building of capacity at the residential schools to deliver high quality grade-level instruction to students.

CONCLUSION

The closure and consolidation process is presenting significant challenges to schools, families and students. Educating students with low-incidence disabilities is an expensive endeavor by the very nature of these areas' requirements of specialized skills, equipment and services. However, it is important to recognize that the economic conditions that have prompted these actions are not likely to subside quickly. Additional adjustments may be required in the future, as many states have only one residential school and those serve both the deaf and blind populations on the same campus. Some states do not have a residential school at all, instead establishing only regional day schools to complement local services. However, with this continued economic pressure, these challenges still must be viewed as opportunities for improvement. Outcome data shows that there is significant room for growth in every placement option, including both the residential schools and the LEAs. As indicated in the legislation's prefacing language, the services to students with visual impairments and those who are deaf or hard of hearing must be both efficient and effective. Moving forward, these schools now are under the administration of the Department of Public Instruction and should have full access to the instructional, accountability, and compliance resources necessary to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. With those resources, it is hoped there will be a fuller continuum of services throughout North Carolina and there will be increased evidence of these students' learning and achieving, like all other students, in order to become globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st Century.

APPENDICES

Legislation

The following recent legislation has informed the writing of this report. Visit the website links and scroll to the specific section listed.

- Appropriations Act of 2007, Session Law 2007-323, § 10.20
(<http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2007/Bills/House/PDF/H1473v10.pdf>)
- Appropriations Act of 2009, Session Law 2009-451, § 10.51
(<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2009/Bills/Senate/PDF/S202v8.pdf>)
- Appropriations Act of 2010, Session Law 2010-31, § 10.21A
(<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2009/Bills/Senate/PDF/S897v8.pdf>)
- Appropriations Act of 2011, Session 2011-145, § 7.25
(<http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2011/Bills/House/PDF/H200v9.pdf>)

Public Hearings Document

Public Hearings were conducted on September 20 (Morganton), September 22 (Wilson), and September 28 (Raleigh) to garner additional public input for the NCDPI to consider in making its closure/consolidation decision. A guidance document, found on the last two pages of this report, was given to all attendees.

Additional Documents and Reports

The following documents and reports will serve as additional appendices to this report. They are available upon request from the NCDPI Communications and Information Division.

- Transition Plan
- Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) Reports
- Facilities Reports
- Public Survey Responses

**(Two-page handout given to attendees at Public Hearings in Morganton,
Wilson and Raleigh – September 2011)**

Legislation

Appropriations Act of 2011 – Session Law 2011-145

SECTION 7.25.(a) The General Assembly finds that the operation of the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, and the North Carolina School for the Deaf (collectively, the "residential schools") no longer meets the needs of the populations they serve in an efficient and effective manner, and that current levels of utilization of the residential schools can be accommodated with two schools. No later than January 15, 2012, the Department shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee of the General Assembly the residential school it has decided to close and the Department's plan for consolidating the programs with those at the two remaining schools. The Department shall base its choice of the residential school to be closed on the following considerations:

- 1) Minimization of impact on services to deaf and blind students currently served by the residential schools.
- 2) Minimization of costs of modifications at the two remaining residential schools to accommodate students from the closed school.
- 3) Maximization of funds generated or net savings to the State from costs avoided due to the closure of one school and the sale or transfer to other State agencies of the school campus and other physical assets.
- 4) Minimization of required travel for students of the school that is closed.
- 5) Historical and cultural significance of the school.

Effective July 1, 2012, the Department of Public Instruction shall carry out the closure and consolidation described in its report.

Rules for Public Hearings

- Public hearings are for the purpose of allowing persons to state their opinions and, if they wish, to give suggestions and recommendations.
- Public hearings hold fast to a time schedule.
- Public hearings do not allow for discussion.
- Public hearings do not allow for questions and answers.
- The following procedure will govern this public hearing:
 - Begin at 5:30 p.m.
 - End at 7:00 p.m.
 - Allow all who signed up to speak to do so as time between 5:30 and 7:00 p.m. permits.
 - Each speaker has three minutes to speak.
 - Each speaker will be signaled when he/she has 30 seconds remaining.
 - Time will be called at the end of three minutes.
 - Any person may submit written comments at the hearing or submit the online survey (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org>).

Timelines

September 2011

- Launch online survey on 9/12
- Conduct three public hearings
 - 9/20 in Morganton
 - 9/22 in Wilson
 - 9/28 in Raleigh
- Close online survey on 9/30

October-November 2011

- Core Committee reviews input
- Core Committee writes report
- The Department of Public Instruction submits the report to the State Board of Education

December 2011

- State Board of Education takes action on the report

January 2012

- The Department of Public Instruction submits the report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee of the General Assembly on 1/15

January – June 2012

- The Department of Public Instruction works with residential schools, local education agencies and others to prepare for school closure

July 2012

- The Department of Public Instruction carries out the school closure and consolidation described in the report

Department of Public Instruction Core Committee

Mary Watson, Director, Exceptional Children Division

Tom Winton, Section Chief, Exceptional Children Division

Barbria Bacon, Superintendent of Schools for the Deaf and Blind/Director, Governor Morehead School for the Blind

Debbie Jackson, Assistant to the Superintendent of the Schools for the Deaf and Blind

Rachael Ragin, Consultant for Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Exceptional Children Division

Julie Kagy, Consultant for Visually Impaired/Assistive Technology, Exceptional Children Division

Ben Matthews, Director, School Support Division

Steve Taynton, Section Chief, School Planning, School Support Division

Becky McConkey/Sarah Harris, Director/Assistant Director, Financial Services Division

Vanessa Jeter, Director, Division of Communication and Information Services

Katie Cornetto, Attorney, State Board of Education

David Mills, Facilitator (retired from the Department of Public Instruction)